

A chemical spill has just happened! What do I do?



When industries storing and using large amounts of Extremely Hazardous Substances are close to neighborhoods or people, there may not be time to evacuate people in the event of a release of these chemicals. Also, evacuations are expensive, disruptive, and sometimes increase danger of exposure. This is where shelter-in-place fits in.

Six Steps

There are six steps in the Shelter-In-Place process that are designed to protect an individual against potentially harmful gases that could be present in an emergency.

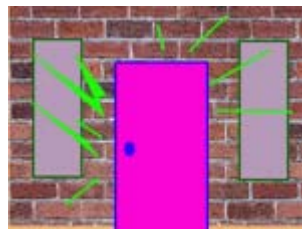
Step 1 Move inside a dwelling such as a house, apartment, or church immediately.

The idea is to not get exposed to air-borne chemicals, which may be inhaled or absorbed through the skin. You are waiting for the chemical release to blow over or dissipate. The theory is that if the concentration of the chemical in the air is low enough, it will not present much of a hazard. Keep in mind that windy conditions are better for diluting the concentration of the chemical in the air than when there is no wind. Also, some chemicals are heavier than air and will move along the ground and sink into depressions or low-lying areas.



Step 2 Close and lock all windows and doors.

This will help keep chemical fumes from seeping into the home and contaminating your possessions. While you are further sheltered inside your home, others will not be able to enter, which will also protect your possessions. Do be alert to knocks at the door or ringing doorbells--the firefighters or emergency responders may decide to evacuate the area if there is a change in the situation. They may also be there to give the all clear signal. A shelter-in-place shouldn't take hours, but you will want to get the "all Clear" signal before ending your sheltering.



Afterwards, if you suspect there has been contamination in your home, ask the emergency responders for decontamination instructions. You may need to wipe down surfaces in your home, or simply allow it to air out. Ask for guidance.

Step 3 Turn off all ventilation systems. (Extinguish heating system and fireplace fires-then shut flue.)

It won't help you if an evaporative cooler, central heating and cooling systems, or air conditioner blow contaminated air into the building. Fireplace fires and heating systems draw in air from the outside, so for the short time while waiting for the outside air to become safe, turn them off.



Step 4 Enter and seal a room to prevent air from entering by using towels and/or tape.

Some contaminated air may still get into the home. This is an additional step to reduce exposure. You may not always be able to smell these chemicals, or see them in the air. (It is a good idea to have prepared for this and have duct or masking tape ready in an interior room. Be sure to turn off any circulating fans.)



Step 5 Turn on the radio for further emergency instructions.

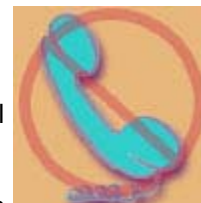
The emergency broadcast system should be providing information about what to do, including the all-clear announcement. Take the time to find out what this emergency broadcast station is before there is an actual emergency. Get an inexpensive portable radio and set it to the emergency broadcast station. Keep extra batteries, too.



Step 6 Stay off the phone - responders will need the phone lines

Stay off the phone! Emergency responders will need the phone lines.

Some areas have phone ring-down systems that contact residents likely to be effected. Calling schools and daycare centers will clog their phone lines, divert their personnel, and might prevent them from being contacted by emergency responders. Unless you are requesting medical help, do not dial 9-1-1 to find out what is going on. If you absolutely must call for non-medical emergency reasons, dial the non-emergency police and/or fire department numbers. (It is a good idea to post the non-emergency numbers for the police and fire departments for easy quick reference.) Some areas have special emergency information numbers that can be dialed for a specific message about an emergency event. Contact your Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) before an incident occurs and ask. Some communities have automatic telephone notification systems that will call to notify people in the event of a chemical release.



Emergency responders have trained and prepared for incident involving chemical spills, and they will help you, but it will take time for them to get there. You need to protect yourself for the first few minutes. Be alert and prepared.

Other:

If you have been instructed to shelter-in-place, do not decide to evacuate instead.



Children: Do not attempt to pick up children from schools or daycare centers unless instructed to do so by the firefighters or emergency responders. Schools and daycare centers should have their own shelter-in-place and evacuation plans in place. Ask to see it. Offer suggestions as needed.

If you believe you may have been exposed to a hazardous chemical, or feel unusual, seek proper medical attention as soon as possible. Not all medical facilities have the trained staff or equipment to deal with chemical exposure. Dial 9-1-1 to report the symptoms and ask which medical facility nearest you to go to. (Exposure to some hazardous chemicals can cause illness and symptoms to develop hours after the actual exposure. Whenever in doubt, seek medical attention.)

If you encounter the firefighters or emergency responders responding to the chemical incident as you are on your way to the hospital or emergency medical facility, notify them if

possible about your condition. The firefighters or emergency responders responding to the incident will usually have data and specific information about what chemical has been released, including specific symptoms to watch for, treatment methods, or other medical advice. They might want to attend to you immediately and start decontamination or treatment.

If you are unable to contact the firefighters or emergency responders responding to the chemical incident while you are on the way to get medical attention, immediately notify the medical facility when you arrive about the circumstances and have the medical facility contact the firefighters or emergency responders responding to the chemical incident for the data and specific information about what chemical has been released, including specific symptoms to watch for, treatment methods, or other medical advice.

The LEPC will also have this information or can get it for your physician, even if the chemical is protected by trade secret laws. Your attending physician can contact the LEPC for this information assistance.

Many industrial chemicals have the same effects on people, and without knowing specifically what chemical a person has been exposed to can hinder medical treatment. Regular physicians do not have much training in diagnosing symptoms of industrial chemical exposure.

Sewers: Chemicals can be accidentally released into sewer systems, causing fumes to arise in homes and other buildings. If you smell a strong or sharp chemical odor inside your home and not outside, ventilate the home and telephone your municipality.

Canals: Chemicals can be accidentally released into canals and laterals. Stay away from the canal and allow the contaminated water to be cleaned up or removed.

Pets: If sheltering-in-place, you may want to quickly bring your pets inside with you or put them in another shelter or building. Shelter-in-place is not normally something of a very long duration. If the pets were outside during the incident and you believe they have been exposed to contaminants, consider shampooing or bathing them, or at least rinsing them off liberally with water. Pets often lick their fur and may swallow contaminants. Be sure to wash their eyes out well with the water, also. The pets probably won't like any of this, so protect yourself from scratches, bites, or other resistance.



EVACUATION

- **EVACUATION**

In the event of an evacuation, stay at home or at your place of work, shelter-in-place, and listen for the emergency information and evacuation announcements by fire or police departments. **PAY ATTENTION TO LOUDSPEAKER ANNOUNCEMENTS - FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS** Police and fire department vehicles may give you specific directions via loudspeaker or door-to-door contact. Follow these instructions and be cooperative.

- **TURN YOUR RADIO OR TELEVISION ON**

Announcements concerning the emergency, specific evacuation procedures, as well as all-clear signals will be broadcast by regional radio and television stations. Please pay attention and follow directions.



- **DO NOT TIE UP TELEPHONES**
Fire department, police, and involved businesses need every available telephone line to initiate help and rescue procedures. Therefore: use the telephone only when absolutely necessary. If all you need is information, please use non-emergency numbers, available in your telephone book. It is a good idea to post the non-emergency numbers for the police and fire departments for easy quick reference.
- **GRAB YOUR FAMILY SAFETY KIT IF PREPARED, OR QUICKLY GATHER WHAT YOUR FAMILY MAY NEED FOR A FEW DAYS.**
You should have prepared a Family Safety Kit in advance, with a towel, map, flashlight, batteries, first aid kit, small radio, prescription drugs, a small sealed container of water, non-perishable snacks and foods, toiletries, eye glasses, plastic trash bags, hearing aid (as needed), wide tape, etc.
- **TURN OFF VENTILATION SYSTEMS, LIGHTS, AND APPLIANCES. LOCK DOORS AND WINDOWS.** Prevent contaminants from entering your home or office in your absence. In the event there are combustible materials in the air, you can help prevent a fire or explosion by eliminating sources of spark or fire.
- **DO NOT BLOCK TRAFFIC**
Police, fire department, and emergency teams depend on free roadways. You may also consider providing transportation for neighbors who may need assistance. If you have been ordered to evacuate and have no way to evacuate, dial 9-1-1.
- **PROCEED CALMLY, OBEY ALL TRAFFIC LAWS, DRIVE CAREFULLY.**
Do not add to the problem by causing an accident or collision. Emergency responders are trained to handle the situation, so help them by cooperating.
- **STAY AWAY FROM THE EMERGENCY SCENE.**
Do not risk chemical exposure by being curious. Do not attempt to pick up children from school. School regulations ensure a swift orderly response to a call for evacuation. (Make sure in advance that the school has such a plan.) The presence of people searching for their children or siblings can only cause confusion and delays. Evacuation reception centers have been organized throughout the area and media broadcasts will inform parents and relatives as to which evacuation center school-children have been taken. The elderly or handicapped may need special assistance also. Some evacuation reception centers may contain facilities for pets. Pets must be on a leash or otherwise restrained.
- **REPORT TO THE EVACUATION RECEPTION AND CARE CENTER FOR REGISTRATION, EVEN IF YOU DO NOT PLAN TO REMAIN AT THE CENTER.**
If someone is looking for you, they will be directed to the designated evacuation reception and care center. Make their search easier by reporting in. These evacuation reception and care centers have been determined in advance of any emergency, but the decision about which evacuation reception and care center will be used will only be made after assessing the emergency situation, and will vary each time. This decision will include the direction the chemicals are traveling and other weather conditions. Do not plan to go to a specific evacuation reception and care center before an incident; you may travel into danger's way.
- **ALWAYS HAVE A BACKUP PLAN AND A PREDETERMINED MEETING POINT** just in case you get separated from your loved ones. Remember to take only necessary items including medications and personal identification.



[Make Your Own Emergency Phone List](#)